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ABSTRACT

Student rejection of traditional campus residence halls in favor of apartment-style living has left colleges and universities with a variety of problems. Research into student preferences has produced some basic requirements: privacy, interaction, territory, security, safety, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, and a sense of responsibility for the environment. These requirements have led to changes in the physical design of new residential buildings and to major renovations of existing dormitories. Some changes include space for spontaneous activities, space of pedestrians and cyclists, and good accessibility of services. Concern has been shown for the number of housing units in each campus neighborhood, the number of students per unit, and the number of people per acre. Building entrances should be oriented to the campus center wherever possible. In renovation projects, care should be taken to preserve the character of the original design. Examples of residence hall innovations are presented including those of Bowie State College, Lawrence University, University of Denver, Calem State College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and California State College at Humboldt. (Author/PG)

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Student rejection of traditional campus residence halls in favor of apartment-style living is old news. But this drastic shift in living patterns left the colleges and universities with a variety of problems. Those problems and some solutions are offered in the following article by Mrs. Erma B. Striner, project director of the Clearinghouse Project, jointly sponsored by Educational Facilities Laboratories and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and aimed at development of an information pool on changing campus living patterns.

The student exodus from campus dormitories has produced the phenomenon of empty rooms and, in turn, a loss of revenue and serious problems for institutions that must meet payments on their mortgages. The exodus also created a loss of the sense of community, which is – or should be – part of the educational process. And it posed problems for neighboring communities, since students end up competing with low-income residents in their search for reasonably priced housing. These problems tend to be more serious in some parts of the country than in others. But the impact of the exodus is an almost-universal concern of college administrators.

Students tend to use such words as "monotonous," "sterile," "impersonal," "institutional," "bland," and "cold" in describing their objections to the traditional residence-hall environment. But, by their exodus, they were saying many other things. They were expressing a need for more privacy, for a sense of independence, for a more home-like atmosphere, for an opportunity to express their individuality, to cook, to entertain their friends, and to gain self-confidence in the living patterns they would follow after graduation. The students' real message, in addition to housing preferences, was that they were searching for a deeper meaning in life.

The change in student attitudes generated a corresponding change in university policies and educational approaches. Many administrators set out to study the problems and develop programs that would enable students to fulfill their new life style on campus. More importantly, they have developed the basic criteria for establishing a good, on-campus community, for the college campus in reality is a microcosm of the community at large.

Research into student preferences, in which the students themselves were involved, produced documentation of a series of basic requirements: privacy, interaction, territory, security, safety, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, and a sense of responsibility for the environment. These requirements led to changes in the physical design of new residential buildings and to major renovations of existing dormitories.

THE CRITERIA FOR CHANGE

In effecting the changes, the planners paid close attention to a number of key considerations. They recognized the importance of scale and the realization that people do not respond well to large, impersonal spaces but require smaller, more intimate spaces for social interaction. There was a concern for the size of residential groupings and an attempt to provide apartments or other living arrangements permitting small numbers of students – anywhere from three to eight – to closely relate to each other on a daily basis. One highly popular arrangement, for example, is a cluster of single study-bedrooms grouped around a common living area, including a kitchen and bath. Where economics permit, dormitories are being converted to apartments or new apartment buildings erected. These usually provide a mix

of efficiencies and one- and two-bedroom units, the mix varying from institution to institution. The mix of single and double rooms also varies on different campuses.

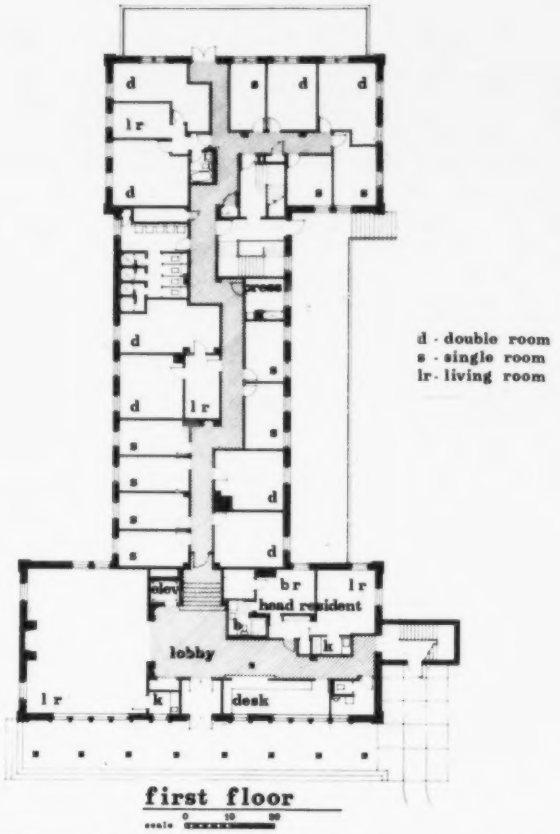
The importance of "neighborhood," and the development of that spirit has been emphasized in the new planning effort. The result has been innovation in programming efforts as well as in physical restructuring. In the latter case, the solution has been the clustering of rooms or suites within buildings and the organization of houses and buildings into campus neighborhoods. Where existing buildings cannot be rearranged by moving or eliminating partitions, the sense of group or neighborhood has been created by the use of such alternative techniques as color coding, the use of different textures in wall and floor coverings, and the use of graphics, all aimed at eliminating the monotony and anonymity of the typical residence hall.

The planners also have shown concern for the number of housing units in each neighborhood, the number of students per unit, and the number of people per acre. They have tried to provide space for spontaneous activities, space for both pedestrians and cyclists, and good accessibility to services, both within and near the housing units. Access and circulation spaces are designed to facilitate natural and frequent encounters between students. Building entrances are oriented to the campus center wherever possible. In renovation projects, care is taken to preserve the character of the original design.

OPTIONS IN LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

The new emphasis on the needs of the individual obviously rules out the old "one-type-of-accommodation-suits-all" approach to residential planning and imposes the need to provide options in living arrangements. This new recognition of individuality also has given rise to the development of a variety of living-learning environments, many of them devoted to an educational or social "theme" selected by the students. In fact, those residence halls which appear to be most popular with students are those offering strong ties to the educational program.

At the same time, an attempt is being made to provide variety in the environment through the use of different furniture, color combinations, and room arrangements in different units. The trend is away from built-in furniture and toward the moveable variety. And room arrangements are designed to be as flexible as possible to accommodate both short- and long-term requirements. Materials for finishes and furnishings are selected to provide a feeling of warmth and a homelike atmosphere. This has led to the installation of carpeting, which also helps to control noise, and, in many



Floor plan of Russell Sage Hall at Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin, indicates variety of living arrangements that can be provided by remodeling a conventional dormitory. (Shattuck, Siewert and Associates, Inc., Neenah, Wisc., architects.)

instances, to the use of wall coverings. Similarly, close attention is being paid to the problems of acoustical and thermal control, to the provision of better lighting and more electrical outlets, and to the addition of such features as floor-to-ceiling cork board and picture moldings that permit students to personalize their quarters.

Many institutions, some acting in response to state laws, are providing ramps and other special facilities designed to remove obstacles that inhibit the mobility of wheelchair-bound students. The ramps, incidentally, also prove helpful to the non-handicapped — students with bicycles or married students with baby carriages, to offer two examples.

A QUESTION OF FUNCTION

The attempt to provide more pleasant living accommodations and to meet new student life styles represents

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only part of the transformation of the traditional residence hall. Its function has also changed. The residence no longer is thought of as a place to store possessions and to sleep. Rather, it is a place to learn to know oneself, to learn to know others, to relax, to develop a sense of responsibility to self and to the group. It is a place to hurry back to; not a place to leave as quickly as possible.

Despite the efforts at transformation, many institutions remain saddled with underutilized or, in some cases, empty dormitories. That reality has generated searches for more efficient uses, such as year-'round occupancy, or for alternative uses, such as conference centers, condominium apartments, or housing for the elderly. The last possibility was explored at a recent conference in Minnesota, jointly sponsored by Educational Facilities Laboratories and the Minnesota State College Board. Taking part in a discussion of the feasibility of developing the "Intergenerational Campus" was an interdisciplinary team of government housing specialists, educations, gerentologists, architects, and design researchers.

The "Intergenerational Campus" concept ties in with numerous recent proposals that formal higher education – as against adult education or extension programs – be offered to all adults and not limited to the "college-age" population. The new campus living arrangements – particularly the living-learning concept, with its emphasis on individuality, informality, and in-house programs and materials – might well lend themselves to the integration into the educational community of older people desiring to continue their higher education or make up for missed opportunities. Other approaches, such as the "course-for-credit" for students who help plan their own environments offered at Justin Morrill College at Michigan State University, can help ease such "non-traditional" students into the educational mainstream.

PATTERNS OF CHANGE

Regardless of the location, size, and type of control of the institution, a discernible pattern has emerged in the restructuring of campus residences. A look at some specific examples will not only demonstrate a widespread recognition of the need for change but suggest that there is a clear focus to the institutional responses. The following examples are excerpted from a soon-to-be-published report from the Clearinghouse Project, which will describe in greater detail the various approaches to major renovation, incremental change, and changes in function in residence halls across the nation.

• Tubman Hall, one of the oldest structures on the campus of Bowie State College in Maryland, was in dire need of repair several years ago, when a decision was made to renovate it rather than erect a new residence hall. The decision was based on cost comparisons which indicated that renovation would be more economical. The renovated Tubman boasts ten-room, suite-type clusters, each with a bath, and a small lounge. Study rooms are linked by conduit to the nearby Educational Technology Center to provide dial access to stored materials. Other amenities include a new entrance oriented to the campus core, new interior stairways providing easy access to all parts of the building, a central control and information center to improve surveillance and security, a beauty parlor, and a recreation center boasting a complete kitchen. Costs of $535,000, excluding site work and architectural and engineering fees, were underwritten by the state.

• Russell Sage Hall at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, represents an intriguing example of renovation that avoids destruction of the traditional architectural character and charm so often valued by students, faculty, and alumni. The project resulted in new spatial arrangements, eliminating a long and monotonous central corridor and providing a variety of single and double rooms, some of them arranged in suites, in a mix of 30 per cent singles, 40 per cent doubles, and 30 per cent suites. The students opted to keep the existing furniture, which was refinished and repaired. However, a key new item of furniture – a moveable wardrobe – was added to permit "permutations and combinations" of arrangements in any room. Corridors were carpeted and end walls painted in contrasting colors to add interest. And the small amenities were not overlooked: they include weekend trunk closets, kitchenette facilities adjacent to small lounges, a press room where students rinse out and dry clothing, a work table in the laundry room, and an entrance ramp for the handicapped which also leads to a bicycle storage room. Total costs were $632,360, in contrast to the estimated $1,052,000 cost for a new building having the same stone exterior.

• Johnson McFarlane Empirical Hall and Centennial Towers Symbolic Hall at the University of Denver offer examples of the implementation of new residence-hall programs. An experimental living-learning program in the biological, physical, and social sciences and in business was inaugurated in McFarlane in the fall of 1970. The building's lobby level was altered and equipment – including a computer terminal linked to the university's computer center – installed to accommodate the program. Other new facilities include a fully equipped darkroom, a resource and reference library, and a conference-room/study-room complex. Students are encouraged to involve themselves in community service, government, business, and research activities, thus extending the residence-hall community beyond the confines of the building. McFarlane's success was followed by inauguration of a living-learning program in art, theater, music, speech, mass communications, philosophy, religion, and English at Tower Hall. The program centers on newly installed Performing, Visual, and Audio Media Centers. There is a student-manned radio station, a small dance studio, a theater with student-built sets and lighting equipment, a darkroom, videotape equipment, film production facilities, a

four-channel audio system for individual listening, and a tape and record library.

• The Residential Community Living Program at California State College at Humboldt offers students a variety of living options and a concept, termed "responsible freedom," which has contributed to the development of a successful community on campus. The concept permits students to make decisions about where and how they will live and to help establish the rules governing group and individual behavior. The program emphasizes individual growth and the need for close human relationships. Different kinds of living experiences are offered in different kinds of housing and "interest-group" programs are offered in a number of special halls. The interest groups are totally student-initiated, although the housing office provides limited funds for staffing and implementation. "Complex coordinators" and "living group advisors" provide staff support and a residence hall council provides overall guidance and coordination. The program recognizes all of the health, educational, and social needs of its students.

• Clusters and color were the tools for change at the East Campus Dorm at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. East Campus was a traditional and charming structure but needed new types of usable common rooms to meet student requirements. The new spaces were created by the relocation of partitions to create clusters of rooms designed to eliminate the monotony of former corridor spaces. A single room in each cluster was opened to the corridor to provide lounge space for 20 to 25 students. The lounges were furnished with tables and chairs and with blackboards, a highly successful addition. Students use these intimate-scale spaces for meetings, tutoring, small parties, and bull sessions. Other, student-suggested interior changes included new lighting, carpeting, and new color schemes. Activity areas, an integral part of the new scheme, include an electronics laboratory, a computer console and dataphone hookup to any of MIT's computer facilities, a darkroom, a TV lounge, a weight room, and ping-pong and pool table areas. East Campus now is over-subscribed and in year-'round operation.

• Salem State College in Massachusetts had residence halls that, while they were only five years old, needed renovation to improve public spaces. Original community lounges located at the ends of each corridor tended to become the domain of students living in adjacent rooms rather than serving the entire floor. Partitions were rearranged to create new room areas within the limited space available. A new color-coding system was introduced to provide variety and identity for different sections of the building. Small areas of hung ceiling were installed to modulate the spaces. Carpeting complementing the color coding was installed, along with improved lighting and new furniture for the public spaces.

DESIGN FOR LIVING

The information gathered in preparation of the Clearinghouse Project report indicates that the "empty-beds" crisis was more important than college administrators had realized. It forced them to stop and take a look at the housing that students were rejecting. And it prompted many of them to analyze the problems and develop solutions. In the process, they have provided the impetus for a new "design for living" on campus, one which makes education a total experience and which establishes criteria essential for the development of a total community.

Erma B. Striner